AUNT TABITHA'S FIRESIDE.

No. IV.—THE OLD CEDAR CHEST.

BY EDITH WOODLEY.

"MAY I come in, Aunt Tabitha?" said Paul, at the same time rapping with his knuckles against the door of a little back parlor.

"Yes, child, if you want to. Lizzie, open the door."

"How snug and comfortable you look!" he said, as he entered.

"Yes, I had a fire kindled here, 'cause I wanted to look over some things in the old cedar chist."

"How lucky I am! I have had a longing to get a peep into that chest ever since I was allowed to eat my meals without a bib? I have imagined it to contain all sorts of things, but I believe my ideal fell short of the real. If I were the owner of all it contains, I might set up for a virtuoso."

"I hope you 'll al'ays try to be vartuous, whether you are the owner of it or not; but I can tell you that there is nothin' in it of any great vally."

"I suppose that Lizzie and I may look at anything we please?"

"To be sure you may."

Unconditional liberty being granted, the fingers of Paul and Lizzie were at once wandering amid a chaos of dilapidated fans, some of them radiant in pictorial embellishments, others in all the glory of tiffany and spangles; broken plumes, which, having waved and nodded over the brow of their greatgrandmother, afterward did the same piece of service for their spinster aunt; and satin slippers, with heels so high that the fair wearer, in order to maintain a true equilibrium, must have possessed the dexterity of a rope-dancer.

Interspersed with these were well-burnished, worn-out thimbles, nat-pins with bead-like heads, silver and steel shoe buckles, and odd halves of scissors which, as they lay gleaming in the lamp-light, had a savage and ominous appearance, calling up associations widely diverse from the clipping of lawns, laces, and linens, the matching of the ends of silver-flowered ribbons, or the cutting off of a used-up needlefull of thread.

But something Paul took to be a letter, which he found lying at the bottom of the chest, excited his curiosity much more than these relics of industry and finery of the days which were gone. It was folded in the form of a square, except that one of the angles was rather acute, into which the superscription was crowded, as if ashamed to be seen. He saw that it was his aunt's name, and, holding it up to his view, he said—

"You told us we might look *at* everything; may we also look *into* everything?"

"Yes, I s'pose you may," said his aunt, sharply eyeing the letter.

All at once she recognized it.

"If that ain't funny!" said she. "I thought I burnt that 'ere letter at least twenty years ago."

"Who wrote it, aunt?" said Paul.

"La! little Markey Beel, I s'pose. He was a harmless little soul as ever breathed the breath of life, but had a softish place in his head."

"He was one of your old beaux, was ne not, aunt?" asked Lizzie.

"Get out with your nonsense, child. What do you expect that the sparks, or the beaux as you call 'em, ever wanted to write to me about?"

"The same as they would to other handsome girls," said Paul. "I have often wondered why so handsome a woman as you are should have remained in single blessedness."

"I can easily satisfy your curiosity on that score. Those that would have me I wouldn't have, and those that I would have, wouldn't have me."

"The reasons you give are certainly conclusive; but I am afraid that you were rather too particular."

"I don't think I was a bit too much so. The first suitor I ever had was little Markey Beel, that writ that 'ere letter you are holdin' in your hand. I was only fifteen years old, and all the gals—I amongst the rest—thought he was dreadful handsome; and so he was arter a sartain fashion. His face was as delicate as a woman's—clear red and white, for you see he was larnin' the tailor's trade, and so worked under kiver. There 's no knowin' but that I should 'ave had him if he had stayed where he was; but the man he was sarvin' his time with went off down below, and Markey had to go with him. I wouldn't engage myself to him; but, arter a while, I consented to correspond, though I told him that I shouldn't write him anything but friendly letters. It was full three weeks before I received a letter from him, arter he went away, which I begun to think was kind o' strange, seein' he was so airnest about writin'! Now brother John—that 's your father, you know, Paul—was al'ays tormentin' me about Markey, and, as I sat readin' the letter, John stole up behind my chair, on tiptoe, and peeped over my shoulder. The first warnin' I had of his bein' there was his burstin' right out a laughin'. I knew in a minute what he was laughin' at, for, though I didn't pretend to any great larnin' myself, I could spell a leetle better than Markey could, for he never would study when he went to school."

"Do let Lizzie and I read it, aunt," said Paul.

"I don't know as 'twould be raly right; but there—Markey has gone off to the Ohio country, and the last I heern tell of him he was called a good citizen, and was gettin' along nicely. He married Sally Place—a purty, harmless little soul as ever lived. It isn't likely that she would ever set a river afire, if she should undertake it; but that put her on an equal footin' with Markey."

As this speech of Aunt Tabitha was considered an indirect consent to Paul's request, he opened the letter, where, occupying one side of a half sheet of foolscap, was displayed the following, of which it may be premised the chirography was quite equal to the orthography:—

"ASTEAMED FRIND,

I dont no but whought yule think strainge I havent rit to you afore, but Ive ben sick with the slough fever, and it made my hed feel so week I darsent rite for fear twould make it feel weeker. Ive thot on you over and over agin, and tried to think to myself whought you were doin. Sumtimes it seamed to me that you wor rite afore my face and eyes spinnin linning close by the back winder, and then I thort to myself, if I had wings like an eagle, Ide fly in less than no time, and peerch rite down on the winder sill close by you. Then agin, jest at night, when I set kinder sollum-like, miditatin, I seam to see you plain as day milkin the cows in the barn yard, and then I long to peerch myself rite on to the west eend of the ridge pole of the barn where I could look down on you. I hope and pray, my asteamed frind, that twill never be your fortin to have a slough fever, for nobody nose whought an ugly thing it is if they never experienced it. Rite soon, and let me no if you are enjoyin the great blessing of health, also if Sally Place nose yet if she is cummin down here to larn a milliners trade. I will now close with two lines of poetry rit by a poet.

Ide walk three times round the market place,
To get wun look of your sweet face.

I remain your lovin frind and
Yours to sarve,
MARK BEEL."

"Did you answer Mark's letter?" inquired Lizzie, when she and Paul had finished reading it.

"Yes, I writ him a line or two, jest to answer his question about Sally Place. If it hadn't been for my word's sake, I wouldn't done even that, for brother John teazed and tormented me so about that terrible 'slough fever,' that I wished Markey had been in Guinea afore I 'd ever agreed to correspond with him."

"Father was right in teazing you, I suspect," said Paul; "for, as diseases are sometimes hereditary in a family, I should have considered it a sad affair to have had half a dozen cousins liable at any moment to be seized with such a terrible disease as the 'slough fever,' especially if attended with such symptoms as a longing to sit on ridge-poles."

"Well, one thing is hereditary, sartain, and that is nonsense, for you are exactly as nonsensical as your father was when he was of your age."

"I shouldn't wish to take after a better man; but come, aunt, let us hear who was your next beau," and, as he spoke, he took up what appeared to be the ivory head of a cane.

"If that ain't curious!" said Aunt Tabitha.

"What is curious?"

"Why, that you should light upon that cane-head, jest as you asked who was my next beau. I had no more idee that it was in the land of the livin' than I had that Markey's letter was."

"Whose cane did it belong to?" said Lizzie.

"Why, old Beau Benner's, as folks call him. You and Paul have seen him many a time. He was a mighty spruce-lookin' chap when he was young, al'ays walked with a cane, and wore his hair powdered and tied in a queue. And you 'd sildom see him without a red waistcoat and white-topped boots. Well, you see he took kind of a fancy to me, and invited me to go with him to the gineral trainin'. There were as many as eight or ten couples of young folks goin' from our place—brother John and his intended, Jim Pringle and his gal, Peter Barton and his sister Dolly, and a good many besides. The trainin' was to be about a dozen miles off, so it gave a chance for a good ride. Well, you see that private houses were open to entertain people on sich a great occasion; and, as the trainin' was to begin purty airly in the mornin', we all concluded it would be best to go the night afore, for fear we shouldn't be in season to see the sham fight. Moses Benner kind o' took the lead in sich things, in them days, and he contrived it so that we all met in one place, and, when we started, there was a nice long string of horses and shays, I can tell you. Moses and I went in the first shay, brother John and his intended in the next, and the rest follered on arter in reg'lar order. We arrived at head quarters in grand good season, and we gals had a nice large room all to ourselves, where we could fix our ruffles and ribbons as much as we were a mind to.

"You see I was al'ays a mighty airly riser, and so were John's intended, and Dolly and Esther Barton, who lodged in the same room with me, so that long afore sunrise we were all up and dressed out in style, so that all we should have to do, when 'twas time to go to see the trainin', would be to clap on our bonnets and shawls. We sot ourselves down by the winders, but there wan't a single soul stirrin'. It wan't a great while, however, afore we seed Moses Benner come out of the hotel, where he and some of the other sparks that calc'lated they were the tip-top, put up. You see it had jest begun to be the fashion for young men to wear tassels to their boots, and Moses, who al'ays carried everything to extremes which belonged to dress, had a pair to his as large agin as the common size, and with such long cords to 'em that they swung out, every time

he stepped, the matter of three or four inches. Well, there wasn't a soul in sight, so I s'pose he thought he 'd practise a few of the airs and graces sich as he calc'lated on when the people were round so that they could see him. So he hild up his head so fur that it seemed as if he was lookin' arter somethin' in the sky, flourished his cane, and stepped short and quick so as to make his boot-tassels fly out. Once in a while he would look down to see if they flew out to his mind, but the major part of the time he kept his eyes turned up to the sky, and, take him all in all, he looked and acted more like a nateral fool than it's ever been my lot to see a body in the whole course of my life.

"As ill luck would have it, there was a nice, honest-lookin' old cow layin' on the side of the road, that hadn't got her nap out, and as Moses was walkin' along, grand as if he thought the ground wasn't good enough for him to step on, he came plump agin the poor old cow, as much to her surprise, I guess, as to his. Moses, of course, went down, while the innocent cause of his disaster made all haste to get up. He follered her example as soon as possible, and with his handkercher wiped off the mud and dirt from his buff-colored pantaloons and the sleeves of his coat as well as he could. The gals laughed *some* I guess, and I wan't slow to jine 'em, I can tell you. When he called to wait on me to the trainin', Dolly Barton put on a mighty long face, and said to him, jest as grave and sober as if she had been a judge, 'I hope, Mr. Benner,' says she, 'that you were not seri' usly injured by your fall this mornin'.' The land, how red the critter turned, while he muttered over somethin' to himself, what we couldn't tell exactly, but it sounded as if he said that he wa'n't much hurt."

"'I am glad to hear it,' said Dolly, 'and I hope the poor cow came off as well as you did; but I don't think you did right to disturb her mornin' slumbers.'"

"By this time the curiosity of the young men in company with Moses was purty well roused up, so Dolly, lookin' all the time as demure as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, went on to tell the whole story in sich a funny, queer way, pretendin' all the time to pity Moses dreadfully, so as to set us all to laughin' in spite of ourselves. If Moses hadn't been a fool, he would 'ave j'ined us, but, instead of that, he looked as 'shamed as a dog. He didn't hold his head dreadful high the rest of the day, I can tell you, which was a lucky circumstance, I thought; for, if he had walked in the same kind o' style as when he was practising his airs and graces airly in the mornin', something worse might have happened than his stumblin' over an old cow. Well, he waited on me round to see the trainin', and home to my father's door, and that was the last of it."

"But how came you by this ivory cane-head?" said Paul.

"Why you see when I arrived home, afore he helped me out of the shay, he leaned his cane up agin the side of the house, and went off and forgot it. It stood in the entry a long time, but he never called for it, and so arter your father was married, and you 'd got to be old enough to ride stick horses, you spied out the cane one day, and ever arter that it sarved you for a horse. You used it purty rough I guess, for you soon got the head off; but how on airth it come to be in the old cedar chist I never shall know."

"And were these two the only ones you wouldn't have?" asked Paul.

"La! no indeed. 'Twould be a tedious undertakin' to give you a list of 'em all. Among others there was Jabe Hardick, and when I tell you that he is full as handsome now as he was in his young days, you'll have some idee of his looks."

"He is certainly no Adonis now," said Paul.

"He was most dreadful hard favored, but he was well to do in the world, and I tried desp'rate hard to like him, and I begun to think I should succeed, when one day brother John said to me, 'Tabitha, says he, 'if you marry Jabe, you must sow a good lot of saffron in your garden.' 'Why?' says I, jest as innocent as a lamb. 'Cause,' says he, 'you 'll have to give him a good dose of saffron-tea as often as once a day, sartain, to keep his ugly looks from strikin' to his stomach.' Well, if you'll believe me, I never could see poor Jabe arterward, but that the saffron tea popped right into my head, so that I could hardly help laughin' right out in his face. Well, he kept looking worse and worse to me, and afore long I gin him the mitten. It didn't quite break his heart as he pretended it would, for in six weeks arterward he was married to Darcus Towner. There, I 've told you enough about my old sparks for once, so don't ask me to say another word."

LIFE.

BY HELEN C. LEWIS.

Oh, 'tis a weary thing to live
When the silver tide of youthful feeling
Grows dim with the touch of sorrow's tone,
And the lonely heart can find no rest
From the dreary storm of life!

When the hopes that once so brightly shone,
But linger in memory, and the flowers,
That once on our pathway bloomed so sweet,
Lie faded and scentless, and all are gone—
Gone to return no more!

Oh, 'tis a blissful thing to die
When the soul is sick of this empty show,
And the spirit is longing to be at rest,
Where care comes never, and all is peace,
In that far-off land of love!

Is it a sin to long for death
When the music of life has lost its charm?
When all that we love to Heaven have gone,
Can it be sinful then to say,
I would I were with them there.